

German Colonialism, Mnemonic Devices, and Transcultural Memory in Jürgen Leskien's Einsam in Südwest (1991)

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Abstract. This paper aims to analyze the construction of German colonial memory that runs across the boundaries of space and time. The problem cannot be separated from the constructions made by the author in various literary works, one of which is the novel *Einsam in Südwest* by Jürgen Leskien, which was published in 1991. This novel contains a diary that depicts the life of the main character Hermann Köppen in the German South-West Africa region, a former German colony in Africa. Diaries and monuments become mnemonic devices in this novel that carry the memories of the colonial Germans wandering until the end of the 20th century. These two mnemonic devices are constructed to change their meaning along with the times. The transcultural approach was chosen as this study's philosophical assumption and paradigm to answer this question. The results show that memory is no longer a single entity. It is also influenced by culture and other memory bearers. This process shows that efforts to lead a single memory in a country are no longer relevant. Openness to other views and influences on the dominant memory must be part of an available memory politics.

Keywords: *Einsam In Südwest*, German Colonialism, Mnemonic Device, Transcultural Memory

1 Introduction

Jürgen Leskien's *Einsam in Südwest* (after this referred to as *EiS*) [1] was published after reunifying the two German states that had previously been divided since the end of the World War II. The novel told about the German colonial period in Africa and was published a year after the independence of Namibia, a country in Africa that Germany colonized in 1887-1919. These two events became important markers for establishing a series of memories for the German nation, which had experienced a disruption. In addition, the development of information technology and globalization has become another impetus to reveal something previously unreachable both in distance and time, including the memory of the German colonial era that killed approximately 80,000 people of the Herero and Nama tribes, which has been hidden for so long. Until now, it is believed that this event was the first genocide of the 20th century. The forgotten memory of German colonialism mentioned by Schilling [2] was caused by discontinuities, gaps, changes in pressure, and 'forgetting' moments, especially after 1945. Meanwhile, Albrecht [3] saw that apart from these historical discontinuities, German colonialism was the scale and time are relatively small – lasting about 30 years (1884-1919) and

covering a small part of Africa and Asia - so it does not become a dominant memory as colonial memory in England. Kundrus [4] states that the anti-Semitic construction during the Nazi era was stronger and more influential than racism, which was closely associated with Africans.

From several views on the discontinuity of the German colonial memory, it can be understood that the space and time of the German colonial memory are difficult to reach and contest with other memories of the German nation such as World War II, the holocaust, and the splitting of Germany into two countries. The disruption and discontinuity of history is the main factor in the low resonance of colonial memory in German society compared to the memory of the holocaust. It is evidenced [5], which states that most German citizens do not know the background of the leadership of the German parliament in 2004 making statements about genocide when visiting Namibia. On the other hand, The Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies of the University [6] marked the visit and an apology for the genocide in Herero as the beginning of the revival of German colonial memory. This memory was later strengthened by the political statement of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, which states that what happened in Herero and Nama constitutes genocide.

With all its effects, globalization also affects the way we view the past. Memory is no longer seen as a stable and rigid entity and only refers to one nation, as Pierre Nora mentioned as a memory site (*lieux de mémoire*). Memory is understood as anchored in global cultural forms in globalization. The mixing and borrowing, transcending and overcoming the central-periphery gap seen by post-colonial theorists as crucial in their approach to literature [7]. It is in line with what Asmann [8] said that remembering is a dynamic process that continues to change due to changing internal pressures and external constellations. Thus we can see memory as an ongoing activity, competing with other memories and a result of negotiations with self, groups, and even the world surrounding them.

The dynamic process of remembering the past is associated by Erll [9] with the transcultural paradigm, which sees memory as fluid and fluctuating. Erll [9] defines transcultural memory as the never-ending voyage of memory's bearers, medium, content, forms, and practices, as well as their constant 'travel' and transformations through space and time, beyond social, linguistic, and political boundaries. This continuous movement occurs in globalization that accompanied World War II and has been moving since ancient times. Traveling memory brings mnemonic forms and content to new life and new meanings in changing social, temporal, and local contexts. Thus it can be said that memory is not an entity but an activity.

The experience of the German colonial period in German-South West Africa is the choice of representation of the German colonial period in this paper. German-South West Africa was chosen to represent the German colonies in Africa because even though the area was smaller than the German colonies in East Africa, the events that occurred were larger than in other German colonies. In addition, the incident is still a distracting debate in Germany as the demand for recognition and compensation to the current German government by the Herero and Nama residents in Namibia.

The long journey of German colonial memory becomes the central theme of the novel *EiS*. This novel results from the author's construction to re-express Colonial memories that the German people have long forgotten. Through the diary of the character Hermann Köppen, the memory of German colonialism is conveyed by revealing his experience with a hybrid family overcoming problems in three different eras, namely the German colonial period, the Nazi era, and after World War II. This novel begins with a story written by the character. Young Hermann was stranded on a beach in South West Africa because of the ship on which the Köppen family ran aground, which caused the death of his father and mother. Hermann Köppen was then raised by a priest and continued as a blacksmith in the German Colony. His marriage to Sister Ursula

gave a daughter named Anna. After Sister Ursula died due to illness, Hermann remarried a Nama tribe woman and had a son named Markus. Problems arose when her mixed marriage became a big obstacle and was brought to court against the anti-mixed marriage law that applies to German colonies. From the start, Anna, white skin, shows her disapproval of her father's actions that tend to defend the natives. Although the father-daughter relationship is maintained, the differences in views on colonialism can be seen in Hermann's diary. Anna married and lived in Germany and became part of the Nazi adherent. Meanwhile, Markus, who has mixed blood, struggled to be accepted in society in German territory.

The memory that continues to run in the memory of Hermann Köppen is a representation of the colonial memory journey of the German people until the post-World War II period, then constructed by the author and received by today's readers. In this study, memory is examined transcultural by looking at the journey of memory and its encounter with other memories. This memory construction cannot be separated from the author's experience, who since the 1980s has been involved in humanitarian projects with UNHCR in several African regions, including South West Africa. The encounter with the memory of the Nazi era draws further on the problem of antisemitism that had developed during the German colonial period. Finally, the post-World War II memory and the 1968 student movement against colonialism have become an inseparable part of German colonial memory to this day. The main problem is; what are the mnemonic devices that carry the colonial memory in the novel? How does the colonial memory travel and be carried by memory bearers through different times and cultures?

Another study of the novel carried out by Ikobwa [10] that considers debates about German cultural memory includes a discussion of colonial history, which focuses on systematic violence committed against inhabitants of colonized territories in South West Africa, as well as their claims for reparations. Meanwhile, Syafruddin and Kurnia [11] analyzed transcultural encounters in the colony space that allow for mutually entangled relationships between cultures that meet in the colony space. From several quests on the research carried out, this paper focuses more on the journey of German colonial memory through two mnemonics devices that appear in the novel *EiS*, namely diaries and monuments.

2 Research Method

This research is based on how colonial memory is represented and constructed in the novel *Einsam in Südwest* and shows a continuous movement and intersects with other memories? The transcultural approach was chosen as this study's philosophical assumption and paradigm to answer this question. Erlil [9] and Juneja and Kurtz [12] believe that investigating memory in a transcultural view requires transmissions. It means the memory content moves from one place or generation and even from one period to another. Alternatively, in other words, it requires circulation, connectivity, or dealing with plurality and difference so that this approach is present to overcome methodological constraints that are nationalist or homogeneous. Thus, transcultural memory opposes the notion of culture as a bound and homogeneous entity based on the assumption that cultural differences and identities are not given but are the product of ongoing relational processes that are socially constructed both through encounters, exchanges, and translations. The transmission, exchange, and translation cannot be separated from memory media or mnemonic devices that link personal and collective memories. It means that personal memories can only gain social relevance through media representation and distribution [13]. This paper studied two German colonial memory media: diaries and colonial monuments. In

analyzing mnemonic devices, Assmann [14] and Falser et al. [13] theory of writing, picture, and monument as mnemonic devices become the references.

3 Finding and Discussion

Assmann [14] mentions several memory media that often appear in literary works: writing, pictures, bodies, and places. Meanwhile, Erll [13] states that media of memory, such as monuments or books, are not neutral carriers of memory. Moreover, as 'devices,' they go far beyond the task of expanding individual human memory through the externalization of information: they create media worlds of cultural memory based on their specific capacities and limitations, worlds that a memory community would not know without them. Furthermore, Assmann [14] states that research on memory media must move from writing. The ideas, hopes, and disappointments inherent in writing are important indexes of the structural changes of cultural memory in modern times. In addition to writing, images also have an important role in memory research Syafruddin and Kurnia [11] mentions that pictures and writing have a special relationship. Through appropriate discourse, certain images have been selected, giving meaning and anchored in the memory of cultural images. However, in reality, these writings and images undergo a transfer process in which the bearers and recipients of memory re-create their distinctive building culture in different cultural contexts [15].

3.1 Diary

In the novel *EiS*, Hermann Köppen's diaries become mnemonic devices that lead the reader to the journey of German colonial memory. Diary is a medium used by authors to convey colonial memories that travel across time and space. The journey of the colonial period described in the novel covers the colonial period itself, in which the inner turmoil of the main characters, namely Hermann Köppen and his wife, has a background of the Hehero tribe. It is important to reveal in the study following Assmann [14] view, which states that research on memory media must move from writing. The ideas, hopes, and disappointments inherent in writing are central to the structural change of cultural memory in modern times.

From his diary, it is known that Hermann Köppen strongly opposed colonialization in Africa. His opposition shows it to the actions of the Kraemer peasants who treated Africans inhumanely.

We are not like these Kramers. What happened on their farm cannot be reconciled with the ideals of most of us, despite all the worries we sometimes have with the staff. I think it is important that this be said here [1].

In addition, his second marriage to Elisa, a Herero woman, shows resistance to the rules established by the colony that forbids mixed marriages. It was a personal attack by Kraemer's lawyers by claiming that.

The witness has never recognized the court order that mixed marriages are null and void. Incidentally, the question arises about how such a man can even be an official of the government railroad. I also remember that the witness spent the first part of his stay in German southwest Africa in intimate communion with Hereros until our missionaries realized this case. I motion for the witness to be rejected as biased in the matter [1].

From this view, we can see how Hermann continued his marriage to Elisa even though the prohibition of mixed marriages was already in effect in the Southwest African region. In

addition, Hermann's attitude against the Germans in court was met with opposition from Anna, Hermann's daughter from his first marriage to Sister Ursula. Anna saw the colonies as Germany's future and racial purity as their German responsibility.

These two views depict the long debate between the colonial revisionist and anti-colonial movements promoted by the East German government since post-World War II. Meanwhile, in West Germany, it appeared along with the students' movement in 1968.

3.2 Monuments

The monument is part of the mnemonic device that appears in this novel. Assmann [14] mentions that certain images have been selected through appropriate discourse, giving meaning and anchored in the memory of cultural images. The two monuments taken in this novel are the Equestrian Rider Statue in Windhoek, which is a monument to commemorate the war with the Herero and Nama tribes. Even though the Herero and Nama tribes were the victims, the monument is inscribed with German victims. The German inscriptions on the high base of the monument are legible: "In honor of the brave German warriors who gave their lives for the emperor and empire to save and preserve this land during the Herero and Hottentot uprisings 1903-1907 and the Kalahari expedition."

Another monument is the elephant monument located in the center of Bremen. In the novel, it is described by Markus as follows.

The monument is an elephant made of especially burned bricks, made of clinker, as they say here. I'll bring you a photo. It stands on a man-high pedestal near the city's main train station, and it is hollow. In this hollow base lies a book of the dead. The names of those who have remained in the southwest are recorded in it. I haven't leafed through the book myself, but bank director Wilms says he also found Ursula's name in it, which amazes me very much - if it's true at all. On the sides of the base, there are panels with the names of the German colonies, i.e., the former ones. A door leads into the base's interior from the front, and the back wall is decorated with portraits of Franz Adolf Lüderitz and von Lettow-Vorbeck. The dead Africans have forgotten them. ... I could read the inscription above the plinth door: OUR COLONIES [1].

The two monuments became a symbol of the triumph of German colonialism at that time. However, over time, these statues and monuments became symbols of resistance to German colonialism. Similar statues that came from Africa and were transferred to Germany became the target of student anger in the student movement of 1968. One of those destroyed was the statue of Hermann von Wissmann in front of the University of Hamburg. Meanwhile, the elephant monument has now turned into an anti-colonial monument. Memori yang berjalan dalam buku harian dan monumen kolonial

This change in perspective on the mnemonic devices of colonial memory shows paradigm change along with time and culture changes. The view of the colony is described as moving across time felt by the Köppen family. Anna was known since childhood to have seen that what her father did against the colonial government and fellow German citizens was a mistake because it was not under the ideals of German colonialism. It is evident in the following quote.

I can't get the picture out of my mind: In the rows of rings around the equestrian statue, Markus grabbed Anna's hand, but she avoided him as if he were a stranger to her. Entirely in the game, with a laughing face, she shook it off like an annoying fly, romped around with her classmates. Moreover, Markus trudged to the edge. Without a word of complaint, he crouched on his heels and watched the neat white children dance [1].

Why do you suddenly no longer want to admit it? Why do you distrust our idea, which will bring the mass of the German people a life of dignity and prosperity? The signs of a new

beginning cannot be overlooked. I ask you, father, to shut yourself up. Not to the new, our people need the worker of the spirit and the worker of the Faust, and we need everyone to whom the fate of the German Reich means something [1].

The long debate about colonialism as happened between Hermann and Anna is a representation of the long debate on German colonialism since the end of the German colonialism era, which goes through the time of Hitler, World War II, the separation of the two German states, and the reunification of the German state. Both of these constitute a perpetual debate about German colonial history. The revisionist colonial circles echoed the narrative of Germany as a good colonial as an attempt to oppose the propaganda of the allied countries that credited Germany during the First World War and accused Germany of not being able to manage the colonies properly. The culmination was the Versailles Treaty, which established Germany as a country that lost the war and had to lose all of its colonies.

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Schilling [2] explains how the image of being a good colonizer was still documented in school textbooks in West Germany until the 1970s. In addition, the depiction of the colonial period is not visible in life in West Germany. It is far different from that in East Germany, which since its formation has branded itself as an anti-colonial state because they believe that colonialism is the pinnacle of capitalism.

Nevertheless, the journey of colonial memory shows the opposition to colonialism on the one hand but, on the other hand, does not succeed in reconstructing the relay between Germany and Africa or East and West. West represented by Hermann Köppen and East by Elisa still shows an asymmetrical construction. Elisa is depicted as fighting inside her heart for what happened in the German colonies but has no power to talk about her disagreement with Hermann. It can be seen from Elisa's attitude when she hears of the massacre of her tribe.

Elisa begged my forgiveness and moved out of the bedroom, made beds for herself, Anna and Markus in their former girls' room, in which one can hardly step now. But I don't want an argument; she will think it up of her own accord [1].

Elisa did the same thing when the horseman monument was built. The monument conceals the facts about the deaths of thousands of members of the Herero tribe.

Amid Hermann's sharp criticism of colonialism in Africa, Elisa's silence shows the inequality in fighting colonialism. Elisa represents Africa, who is considered passive in responding to German colonialism in Africa. Hermann's role was highlighted in opposing colonialism. It shows how until the end of the 20th century, when the novel was published, Africa was still portrayed as a silent and powerless party against Western domination.

In addition, the monuments show the changes and movements of memory caused by differences in socio-political situations and including cultural carriers. The Windhoek Equestrian Monument, erected in the city of Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, which was once a German territory, has now been demolished to break the memory of German colonialism in Africa. However, various similar statues have been erected in Africa, and some have been moved to Germany. One of them is a statue of Hermann von Wissmann, the former governor of

the German East Africa region who ruled from 1885-1886. This statue originally stood in Dar es Salam, Tanzania, but after the defeat of Germany in World War I, it was brought to Germany and erected in the bustling city of Hamburg in 1922. Until the late 1960s, Hermann von Wissmann was regarded in West Germany as a pioneer Afrikaforscher (African explorer). This statue became a symbol of German colonial glory. However, a change occurred when there was an anti-colonial student movement in West Germany. The statue was finally overthrown on October 31, 1968. At the same time, several similar statues in East Germany had already been destroyed earlier because it is considered a symbol of colonialism.

The statues show how mnemonic devices can change their meaning according to the times. Statues that were originally a symbol of the triumph of German colonialism at one time had to turn into symbols of exploitation of the colonized countries. The same thing happened with the elephant statue that stands in the city of Bremen. The statue, originally a symbol of glory, is currently still standing, but with a new meaning as a statue of anti-colonialism. This statue was re-inaugurated in line with the Bremen resolution, which stated, "*The city citizenship welcomes (...) the ongoing renovation and rededication of the colonial monument (the elephant on the Bürgerweide) to an anti-colonial monument...*"

4 Conclusion

The reinterpretation of mnemonic devices shows that the history of colonialism, which was originally a western construction, has changed by showing a debate in Germany's colonial past. German colonial memory moves across time and space with various mnemonic devices. The writings and pictures, the sculptures inside, are mnemonic devices that carry memories across the colonial space and time itself. We see how colonial memories are depicted through debates that develop along with the changing times. Cultural and political backgrounds have played a significant role in changing this view.

Likewise, German colonial statues and memorials changed from symbolizing colonial heroism and glory to being a common enemy and anti-colonialism. Both of these show how memory moves and travels. In addition, German memory is ultimately a construction made by the Germans and significantly influences colonial memory constructed by Africans. This interplay shows that memory is transcultural. This transculturality also confirms that a single narrative about memory has been increasingly marginalized in this era of globalization. In contrast, the entanglement interplay between existing memories will further dilute the relationships in a society that coexists with its memory.

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